

[Harry Pearson]

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Folkstuff - [Rangelore?]

Phipps, Woody

Rangelore

Tarrant Co., Dist. #7 [76?]

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Harry Pearson, 53, was born in Lamar co., Tex. His father operated a farm, then moved to Pickens co., Indian Terr., in 1888, to establish a stock farm. Harry was taught to ride a horse at an early age, and was employed on different outfits until he was 20, when he quit the range to go to Ft. Worth, Texas., where he entered the cattle commission business on the Stock Yards. He was again employed on the range in 1934, and is able to explain the difference between the cowboy of former days, and the ranch hands of today. He was forced to retire from all activity in 1935, and now resides at 605 Samuels Ave. Ft. Worth, Tex. His story:

"Yes suh, I really know the range life well because I got it in my blood just before the old time range went out. You see, there's a great difference between the old time way of runnin' critters and the way it's done today. But first, my name is Harry Pearson, and I was born on my dad's farm, in Lamar county, June 26th, 1884. When I was about four years old, my dad moved us to Pickens county, in what was known in them days, as, 'The Territory'.

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"Marietta Okla was just then getting to be a place. I did recall the fellow's name that put up the first store there, but I guess it's done plum slipped my mind. Dad's place was five miles South of Bowman's Station, and alone to Marietta. The place he got was known as the Old Thacker Place, but he didn't have so many head of critters on it. Never as much as 500, and I done forgot the iron he run under.

"Our place was just South of Bill Washington's place, and he shore enough run a ranch. I reckon he had around 10-18,000 head on his place with the Garter brand. It was a line burnt all around the left hind leg of all of his critters. I reckon that's the only brand of it's kind in the world. It was known as the, 'Garter Brand'. C.12 - 2/11/41 - Texas 2 He had about three big ranches around over the Territory. One of 'em was on Big Mud Crick, about 60 miles from his place close to use I don't know the brand or the number or critters in his iron out there but I reckon 'twas about the same size as his place in Pickens county. They tell on old Bill that he used to drive a couple of bays and a heavy two-hoss wagon out there, 'tend to business, then drive back in one day. Of course, the day might have been 18 hours or more, but they said be made it in one day. 120 miles in one day!

"They was so many cow punchers around there in that country that it was just as nacheral for me to learn to ride a hoss as it is for a duck to learn to swim. I got to where I was a fair to middlin' wild hoss buster by the time I was 12. At that time, I went to work for Jeff Thompson, who run about 2,000 head in the 'JD' iron. His place was located about five miles South of Marietta, Okla.

"Since it was a pretty small place, I didn't have but very little sleepin' out to do, but what I done, was done just like the punchers on the big outfits done. That is, I slept with my saddle for a pillow, my saddle blanket for a mattress, and my slicker and another blanket for cover. They was sev'al times that I got caught sleeping out when a 'Blue Norther' come up. A 'Blue Norther' is a cold, wintry spell that just freezes everything up in no time flat. I can't explain it in anyway except that it comes up in an hour or two, and noway to tell it except by the critters getting restless about six hours in advance. They had some sort

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of sense that told them. These blue northers are not always so bad, but are pretty tough when you're out on the prairie without much cover or any protection.

"The thing we all done in a case like that was after we 3 got through cooking up our beans and coffee, with a little beef, we'd move the fire over and make our flop down on the warm spot. The ground would ordinarily keep warm for as much as six hours at a time this away. Then too, another thing to remember about making a bed down like this, is to always make it down on a sort of a high spot, and make drains away from you. You could make these drains with your boot heels, dragging them away from the spot you intended to flop on.

"I never will forget my first boots and Stetson. I bought 'em with money I made myself, working on the 'JD'. They was lotsa prices you could pay for hand made boots but I just paid \$10.00 for my first, and \$6.00 for my Stetson. Man!, was I macked out?! Some of the old timers still like to rag me about the way I acted when I got my first cow puncher clothes.

"I felt pretty important, going around in my cow puncher rags, and really tried to make Jeff a better hand. What I wanted to do, was get to be as good a cow puncher as Billy Thompson, Jeff's bud, who run around 12 to 1500 head in his iron over in Love's Valley. I don't recall the iron, but I do recall that Billy wrangled all those critters by his lonesome without anybody's help. He was regarded as pretty tough, and capable of taking care of anything he had so he was left strictly alone by the loose rope gentlemen.

"They was some more fellows that I admired, and wanted to copy. A couple of them come from a family of farmers by the name of Epps. Bill Epps was an ordinary cow punch but his bud, Caleb Epps, was an swashbuckling a buckaroo as ever slapped an iron on a 4 critter. Caleb swaggered and grandstanded everything he did. He was good and knew it, and he wanted you to know it while you was around.

"I saw Caleb bust many a wild hoss, and nobody ever saw him throwed. I saw him riding a killer that had stomped several men, and this killer had a trick of bucking hard for awhile,

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then coming back over on his rider. That was a most dangerous practice, and one that usually was the end of a hoss because somebody'd shoot it to save the waddy riding him. Caleb asked that nobody shoot the hoss, no matter what, so we all lined up on the Hoss corral fence, to watch the show.

“Bill Washington himself, and Bill Epps, helped Caleb to get off good. The hoss bucked, sunfished, swapped ends in mid-air, and put on a big show for about five minutes, which is a hell of a long time to be in the storm seat of a bucking cayuse, then went up and over. We all yelled out because Caleb got his boot hung in the stirrup. Some of us turned our heads, others jumped down and started to run to Caleb to help him. Several had their guns out, but Caleb had asked that the hoss not be shot, so there we was. The hoss only pinned a part of Caleb's left foot under him, though, and when he rolled over to get up, Caleb was beside him. When that hoss got on his feet, Caleb was still ridin' in the saddle, and what's more, rode that hoss to a stand-still. We all took our hats off to Caleb and had a big celebration on that.

“Caleb, as I said, was quite a swaggerer. He bullied around and men had to take it because they knew he'd never met his equal in fast shooting. Caleb could draw his six shooter in the time it takes to say it, and he never missed so's anybody could tell it. One 5 Christmas Day, him and some more fellows had been gambling all night and day, down on the Green Farm, about five mile South of Marietta, and an argument came up. The man that started the argument, got real bad about it, and jerked his gun out to shoot Caleb. I never saw this because I was just a kid, but I remember all excepting the names of the men that took part. They said that Caleb let him get his gun plum out, then drew and shot him before he could shoot. One shot got him in the heart. Caleb had some sort of a triggerless pistol that shot real fast. I think they called him a 'Gun fanner'. That meant that his gun didn't have a trigger but was shot by gently hitting the hammer with his hand. Anyway, it shot so fast that this man was killed before he could shoot, and another was shot in the foot.

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"Caleb had to light out after that, and he became a desparado after that. 'Twas a shame too, because his whole family were good people. I reckon all families has black sheep in them, though. The man he killed, was took to the cemetery by a bunch of men, on the way, they come to a crick, and the crick was up so high that they decided to come back the next day. They just covered the man up out on the fields and come back the next day and buried him.

"When I got to be about 14 years old, Jeff sold his critters to a commission company, who come and got the herd, and drove it to Abilene. I was offered a chance to go with it, but turned it down because a lawyer out of Gainsville, Texas, bought the land and promised me a job. Jeff went to Amarillo to ranch, and that's the last I ever saw of him. This lawyer, I don't recall his name, stocked the place with about 8-900, two to five year old beef 6 steers.

"All I done wastto ride the fence line, and keep it repaired. I done a little branding and so on, but not much. The main thing about this period was that I was really riding wild hosses. I busted about eight of them in that year, and I had to go out and catch 'em up myself. They run loose on the plains, and all we had to do, was go out and snare 'em into a trap. The trap was always a corral built pretty high in an arroyo, with an open gate to'ards the way you expected to haze 'em in. When you get 'em in, you closed the gate, roped the hoss to a snubbing post in the center, which was almost always a tree that the corral was built around. After the hoss was snubbed and tied, it was up to the rider to put his saddle on and take the hoss from there on.

"After a year working for the lawyer, he sold all the beef off, and left me without a job. From 15 to 20, all I could get to do, was a day's work here and there. No steady job with anybody. It was hard times in the cattle business, and top hands were getting \$14.00-\$15.00 a month and chuck. Working by the day, I'd get 50¢ to a \$1.00 a day. About

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the most I done was to hunt. They was shore good hunting in them days. Plenty prairie chickens, which aint nowheres now, big [flocks?] of wild turkeys, and plenty deer.

“Along about the time, I took to spending more time in Marietta, where I'd meet the ram rods for the different outfits, and ask them for a job. The U.S. Marshalls for the Territory would come through, and I'd get to see them. They was all ex-cow punchers, and had to be bad men to get the job they had. They was sent out to get bad men just like the Texas Rangers, and they pretty well handled the job. I recall McLemore, Ledbetter, Mashawn, McClure, 7 and several others. They'd come through with about four-five wagons and 12-14 deputies with 'em. One of them, Tom McClure, never toted a gun. He got his man just like the rest of them, but he always out-talked his man. I recall now how hard it was for the cow punchers to believe that Tom never toted a gun. They always believed he had a hide-out on him somewheres, which he pulled when his men wasn't expecting it. I don't know. I did see him a number of times and I never saw a gun on him. He later got to be sheriff in some Texas county, and I read something about him and a kidnapping case in the papers. That's about all I could tell about him, or any of the rest of them. Of course, every one of them had tales going the rounds about how tough they was, but I don't recall any of them right now.

“After I got married when I was 20, I took my wife and went to the Horseshoe Ranch at Hickory Grove, which was owned by Judge Lindsey at Gainsville, Texas. They was so many sections on this place that I never got to where I'd covered all of it. I don't yet know how many sections there were on it. The Horseshoe run good stock and it was along about this time, that cattlemen started to dehorning their critters. We'd dehorn and brand at the same time.

“The roundups was the same on all the places. The Spring roundup to brand the calves and make a count, besides selling off a few if the money was needed or there was a good market, and the Fall roundup for the branding and sorting of the market critters. You see, you'd have several grades of critters from the prime fat to the scrubs, and if the critters

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was sorted before the sale, the rancher made more money. 8 “The thing I liked bout about the Horseshoe was the wild hosses. They was plenty of them, and several different kinds. Spanish, Mustang, and mixed stock with a little of all kinds of blood in them. Some of 'em would buck like sixty, and some of the others would give up in just a short time of bucking. It did seem like the harder a hoss was to bust to a bronc, the better a hoss he made for cutting out and other ranch work. I guess that was because he had more salt to him. Or it might have been that when we had a hard time busting him, we appreciated him more and took more pains in training him.

“I worked a year on the Horseshoe, then came here to Fort Worth to go into the commission business. That's the way I made my living up 'til '34, when I went to work on the Alred Ranch in Parker county. They called it a ranch. I wouldn't call it a ranch because they wasn't but about 400 head on the place. It was more of a feed lot than a ranch. I don't recall whether they even bothered to brand the critters or not. I didn't work but 5 months because the modern cow boy aint a cow puncher but a ranch hand. His job calls for more plowing and farming than it does cow punching, which never did appeal to me so I left 'em with their ranch and came back to Fort Worth.

“Since I got back, I've done a little of this, and a little of that, but not much of anything. because I'm not able to do a day's work like I used to be.